

Panel discussion

How can universities combine requirements that stem from the three missions?

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Issues for the debate

1. The three missions are teaching, research, and interaction with/contribution to society. For the first two, a minimal level has to be ensured. The third mission is relatively new (as a mission, not as a practice) and no “sufficient level” of this type of contributions is yet indicated. There is, of course, the question of directions and beneficiaries, with the big debate being about economic contributions in a globalizing world vs. community and local orientations.
2. There is the tension between good teaching and good research, and differentiation in the higher education system as in the USA (from top research universities to community colleges) and in another way in countries with a dual system (universities vs. polytechnics and colleges) where the borderline between the two parts is contested and carefully watched. Differentiation is a fact, anyway, but when pushed by policy makers (e.g. labelling and funding different types of universities) there is protest.
3. The Humboldtian ideology of necessary combination of teaching and research is used to defend specific interests. As an ideology, it primarily reflects the orientation of scientists and scholars working in higher education institutions towards their disciplines and fields of inquiry, whose communities have to be reproduced. In a world where the majority of degree holders will not follow a scientific/scholarly career, this ideology is counterproductive. In particular cases, an argument for the combination of teaching and research might still be put up and followed, but it should not be extended to become a design requirement for institutions of higher education.
4. Excellence of research is pursued by academics, by their institutions, and now also by policy makers. Cf. the rankings of universities and how these are used, and the German *Exzellenz* initiative. Some obvious comments: Excellence is now understood comparatively, it is “ending up higher than others”. So universities vie for position, and forget about substance. There is simplistic imitation of present top-level research universities. And consider that there is room for only so many “excellent universities” – what are all the others going to do? More important for our panel is the possible tension with relevance, and thus the third mission. In many areas of science and scholarship, this tension is not structural. Excellence and relevance go together (there are quantitative and qualitative data to support this), and there is often some division of labour within groups and centres.
5. There is still little discussion of the combination of all three missions. When integrity of academic work is discussed, it is mostly about the temptations of symbolic and/or financial

rewards of being active in the third mission (integrity also refers to the avoiding of fraud and plagiarism in pursuing a scientific career).

The key challenge however is that within an institution of higher education all three missions (with varying emphasis) are present. My proposal is to go for more internal differentiation. This will also require a more heterogeneous structure and functioning of the institution (cf. my notion of a post-modern university)